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ABSTRACT

This document explores issues of leadership for accountability and reviews five resources on the subject. These include: (1) "Accountability by Carrots and Sticks: Will Incentives and Sanctions Motivate Students, Teachers, and Administrators for Peak Performance?" (Larry Lashway); (2) "Organizing Schools for Teacher Learning" (Judith Warren Little); (3) "Making Standards Stick: A Follow-Up Look at Washington State's School Improvement Efforts in 1999-2000" (Robin Lake and others); (4) "Leadership for School Improvement" (Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning); and (5) "The Lifeworld of Leadership: Creating Culture, Community, and Personal Meaning in Our Schools" (Thomas J. Sergiovanni). (RT)

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Leadership for Accountability

Larry Lashway

In the last decade, standards-based accountability has grown from an interesting idea to an inescapable daily reality. States are following somewhat different paths, but in all cases the message from policymakers is clear: Meet expectations or face the consequences, which range from public embarrassment to school closure.

For school administrators, the accountability challenge is three-fold. First, principals must lead their staffs in searching for instructional strategies that will meet the new expectations. Because so many of today's standards call for achievement that transcends traditional academic skills, the task requires significant teacher learning, not just better implementation of traditional methods.

Second, principals must marshal the organizational resources to support a standards-based approach. This means not only finding the time and money but reshaping routine policies and practices. Staffing, scheduling, and other seemingly mundane issues can have a significant impact on a school's capacity to meet new standards.

Third, principals must provide leadership that supports the standards in a positive way, yet protects the school's values and traditions. Standards are bureaucratic mandates, not just instructional goals, and they can be highly intrusive in the life of the school, and insensitive to the human needs that practitioners are dedicated to serving. When standards become standardization, leaders must mediate between external demands and internal values.

All this comes at a time when school leadership is being redefined. A decade ago, the accountability challenge evoked images of strong top-down leadership, calling for principals to firmly take the reins, point the direction, and lead the charge. Today, shared decision-making is the norm, and stakeholders expect to have a voice in determining the school's direction. Principals retain the ultimate responsibility, but they must work with and through others to get the desired results.

Concrete solutions remain elusive, but the works reviewed here provide insights into the different dimensions of this challenge.

Larry Lashway is a research analyst and writer for the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management at the University of Oregon.

Larry Lashway takes stock of today's comprehensive accountability systems.

Judith Warren Little explains how school leaders can support significant teacher learning.

Robin Lake and colleagues examine the differences between schools that sustain improved student learning and those that do not.

The staff of the ***Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning*** explores the leadership demands of transformative change.

Thomas Sergiovanni discusses the leader's responsibility to protect the school's core values from bureaucratic requirements.

Lashway, Larry. **Accountability by Carrots and Sticks: Will Incentives and Sanctions Motivate Students, Teachers, and Administrators for Peak Performance?** Eugene, Ore: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, in press. *Available from*: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, 800-438-8841.

For many, "accountability" just means delivering results. When

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schools are seen as underachievers, taxpayers simply want evidence that educators are living up to their responsibilities. By contrast, this monograph makes it clear that today's standards-based accountability systems are aimed at systemic change incorporating five interlocked components:

1. Clear, intellectually challenging standards set the target.
2. Carefully designed assessments show that standards are being met.
3. "School report cards" and other indicators communicate the results to practicioners, parents, and public, creating pressure for improvement.
4. Incentive systems motivate participants by providing meaningful consequences.
5. Professional development is realigned with the learning needs of teachers.

However, practice often falls short of this ideal framework, and schools may have to comply with poorly designed state systems in which the different pieces of the puzzle don't fit together. For example, state assessments are not always carefully aligned with state standards, leaving schools in the position of building their curriculums around one set of goals and being tested on a different set.

Summing up the state of the standards movement, the author notes that accountability has demonstrated its staying power and is likely to continue setting the agenda in the foreseeable future. While early test scores have often been discouraging, schools are taking accountability seriously, and at least some have improved.

At the same time, it is far too early to know whether accountability can create deep, enduring change. Are the standards realistic? Does the new system really motivate educators and students? What must happen in classrooms for students to reach the standards? How does accountability affect the rest of the classroom agenda? School leaders will be key players in addressing these so-far unanswered questions.

Little, Judith Warren. "Organizing Schools for Teacher Learning." In *Teaching as the Learning Profession: Handbook of Policy and Practice*, edited by Linda Darling-Hammond and Gary Sykes. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999. ED 431 368. $49.95. *Available from:* Jossey-Bass, Inc., 350 Sansome St., San Francisco, Calif. 94104. 888-378-2537.

The new standards vary in rigor, but many of them push expectations beyond current levels by asking students to engage in complex thinking and problem-solving. To help students meet these standards, teachers themselves face a formidable learning curve.

In this chapter of a comprehensive handbook on professional development, Judith Warren Little describes how school leaders can mobilize teacher learning through a careful combination of instructional vision and focused management practices.

Little sets down five guidelines:

1. *Make collective inquiry into student learning the heart of professional development.* All teachers learn from experience by observing their students. Little says that this learning, which is usually informal and individualized, should become collective, systematic, and sustained. When teams of teachers engage in dialogue and debate over the quality of student work, or join together to analyze assessment results, the payoff is deeper insight into the learning process.

2. *Organize daily work to support teacher learning.* Daily routines can hinder or help teacher learning, and they also send important signals about the organization's priorities. For instance, teacher assignments can be based on internal politics, or they can be used to put teachers in settings that will make the best use of their knowledge and skills. Similarly, workloads and schedules that leave teachers with little out-of-class time make sustained reflection next to impossible.

3. *Develop alternative approaches to teacher learning.* By now, most practitioners agree that the traditional after-school sessions or "one-shot" workshops do not provide optimal conditions for learning. Principals should seek alternatives such as teacher research teams, staff retreats, planning days, summer institutes, and classroom visitations.

4. *Provide feedback on student learning.* State accountability systems ensure that test scores are communicated widely, but making the best use of those results depends on local leadership. Aggressive program review and teacher evaluation linked to student learning will keep professional development focused on essential goals.

5. *Develop an ethos that supports teacher learning.* Organizational structures are important, but school values, beliefs, and norms must also support teacher learning. Learning thrives when practitioners are committed to a candid public examination of current practices and a willingness to make whatever changes are necessary.

Lake, Robin; McCarthy, Maria; Taggert, Sara; and Celio, Mary Beth. Making Standards Stick: A Follow-up Look at Washington State's School Improvement Efforts in 1999-2000. Seattle, Wash.: Center on Reinventing Public Education, 2000. *Available from:* Center on Reinventing Public Education, University of Washington, Box 363060, Seattle, WA 98195-3060. 206-685-2214. Download from **www.crpe.org.**

Principals trying to lead their schools to improved student performance may sometimes feel like directors of a Broadway musical. When the frantic effort and long hours finally pay off with a successful opening night, there remains the stark realization that there will be another show tomorrow, and the next day, and the next. Improvement is not a one-time event; how can schools sustain progress over time?

Robin Lake and colleagues have been exploring that question for several years with school principals in Washington State. In an earlier study, the researchers found that elementary schools made notable gains on the statewide assessment by maintaining a clear focus on key goals, working as schoolwide teams, zeroing in on individual student needs, and adopting a "no excuses" attitude. Their current study finds that the same holds true for middle schools, and also tracks the progress of elementary schools since the previous assessment.

Not all the schools that raised their math and reading scores in the previous round were able to sustain the gains for an additional year. About 29 percent showed a decline in both areas, whereas 54 percent showed an increase in one area, and only 17 percent were able to raise scores in both areas.

In some cases, the declines may have been more illusory than real because year-to-year comparisons may reflect variation among student cohorts rather than trends in student achievement. But other differences were also apparent. Schools that kept improving had not just adopted a particular set of strategies, they had made improvement a part of the culture by taking action in four key areas:

- Consistently analyzing data;
- Zeroing in on problem areas;
- Addressing individual student needs; and
- Using classroom assessments that reflected the new standards.

The researchers also identified several key leadership challenges:

- Finding the tools and time to analyze needs;
- Staying focused on key goals without sacrificing learning in other areas;
- Helping staff deal with the pressure of new expectations;
- Coping with contradictory district or state mandates;
- Finding the right balance between principal authority and teacher autonomy;
- Dealing with staff turnover; and
- Involving parents and students.

While making progress, even the best schools continue to face an uphill journey.

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning. **Leadership for School Improvement.** Aurora, Colo.: Author, 2000. $10.00. *Available from:* Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning, 2550 S. Parker Road, Suite 500, Aurora, CO 80114. 303-337-0990. Download from **www.mcrel.org/products/school%2Dimprove/leadership.asp.**

Whereas the work of Lake and colleagues identifies specific leadership challenges posed by accountability systems, this essay from Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) puts the issue of leadership into a comprehensive theoretical context.

The authors begin by distinguishing between "incremental change" and "deep change." Incremental change fine-tunes the system through a series of small steps that do not depart radically from the past. Deep change alters the system in fundamental ways, offering a dramatic shift in direction and requiring new ways of thinking and acting.

Whereas healthy schools use both kinds, standards-based accountability requires deep change that transforms curriculum, instruction, professional development, and data collection. Teachers, students, and parents are all affected, posing a severe leadership test for principals.

The authors argue that current conceptions of school leadership, such as the standards proposed by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium and the American Association of School Administrators, do not fully encompass the skills needed for deep change. After reviewing the literature on organizational change, they offer the following guidelines for administrators:

1. *Recognize that leadership is not management.* Focusing on small, manageable tasks may provide a feeling of accomplishment, but the satisfaction may come at the cost of neglecting the more critical needs of deep change.
2. *Give up the notion of being a hero-leader.* The all-competent and all-knowing leader is an appealing ideal, but when the leader leaves, the organization is rudderless.
3. *Develop broad-based leadership.* In place of heroic leadership, principals should develop leadership capacity throughout the school community.
4. *Encourage and nurture individual initiative.* For community leadership to develop, leaders must protect and encourage the voices of participants who offer differing points of view.
5. *Build a learning organization.* Deep changes require deep learning, and leaders must build teacher learning, into the everyday fabric of school life.
6. *Take a balcony view.* Leaders immersed in incremental change often fail to step back and look at the big picture. Deep change requires knowing what is happening, distancing one's ego from daily events, and honestly appraising the state of the organization.

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The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) is a national information system operated by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI). The ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, one of 16 such units in the system, was established at the University of Oregon in 1966.

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ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, 5207 University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon 97403-5207. Phone 800-438-8841.
Web site: http://eric.uoregon.edu

Sergiovanni, Thomas J. **The Lifeworld of Leadership: Creating Culture, Community, and Personal Meaning in Our Schools.** San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000. 218 pages. $27.95. ED 436 829. *Available from:* Jossey-Bass Inc., 350 Sansome St., San Francisco, CA 94104. 888-378-2537

As much as parents and the public want improved academic performance, they also expect schools to develop happy, well-adjusted, and moral human beings. Perhaps the greatest leadership challenge in accountability is keeping a strong focus on improvement without forgetting the rest of the agenda.

Thomas Sergiovanni highlights this dilemma by dividing schools into two domains. The *lifeworld* consists of the values, beliefs, and purposes that knit the school community together and give significance to everyday activities. The *systemsworld* is concerned with the technical methods by which those purposes are carried out.

Both domains are necessary, but healthy schools are those in which the lifeworld drives the systemsworld. When the reverse is true—when the means dominate the ends—schools become dysfunctional.

For Sergiovanni, standards-based accountability serves the lifeworld by providing the means to judge whether thoughtfully-chosen goals are being achieved. However, when standards are interpreted as standardization, prescribing "one best way" to teach, the systemsworld begins to colonize the lifeworld, and the school suffers.

Noting the many disputes over the nature and content of standards, Sergiovanni concludes that standards are determined by professional and political judgments, not by scientific analysis. When these judgments are made at the state level, local school communities may find themselves forced to march in lockstep toward goals they have not chosen.

Likewise, when 12 years of education are reduced to a single standardized test, the individuality of learners is not respected. Pressure to pass the test may lead teachers to put aside thoughtfully-crafted lessons in favor of "test prep" drill; in the worst-case scenario, surviving the high-stakes test becomes more important than actual learning.

As an alternative, the author recommends a "layered" approach to standards, with states, school boards, teachers, students, and parents sharing in the formulation of standards. Most important, the evaluation of school effectiveness should be holistic, based on more than a single test of a few academic skills. Excellent schools are also characterized by positive climate, respectful relationships, equity, strong home-school links, and many other traits.

In short, he provides a thoughtful argument that deep change will occur only when leaders treat schools as communities that share core values, commitments, and passions. □

Research Roundup is published four times during the school year by the National Association of Elementary School Principals. Single copies: $2.50; bulk orders (10 or more): $2.00 ea. Virginia residents add 4.5% sales tax. Specify date and title of issue when ordering. Checks payable to NAESP must accompany order. Send to National Principals Resource Center, NAESP, 1615 Duke Street, Alexandria, Virginia 22314-3483.

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